

# THE STRAIGHT DOPE

FIGHTING IGNORANCE SINCE 1973  
(IT'S TAKING LONGER THAN WE THOUGHT)

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 10-16-2005, 11:20 AM

#1

[The Flying Dutchman](#)

Join Date: Nov 2000  
Location: 50N West Georgia Strait  
Posts: 8,617



Guest

**Dr. Albert Schweitzer, hero or zero?**

I had just perused the Stormfront web page and came across this [blog](#) quoting the famous and revered Dr. Albert Schweitzer from his 1961 book, From My African Notebook. He is quoted as follows;

Quote:

I have given my life to try to bring unto them the advantages which our civilisation must offer, but I have become well aware that we must retain this status; white, the superior, and they the inferior; for whenever a white man seeks to live among them as their equal, they will either destroy him or devour him, and they will destroy all his work; and so for any existing relationship or for any benefit to this people let white men from anywhere in the world who would come to help Africa remember that you must continually retain this status; you the master, and they the inferior, like children that you would help or teach. Never fraternise with them as equals, never accept them as your social equals; or they will devour you; they will destroy you."

Somewhat skeptical, I sought confirmation, but all I got were questionable racist sites, [one](#) of which added a statement just previous to the above quote as follows;

Quote:

I have given my life to alleviate the sufferings of Africa. There is something that all white men who have lived here, must learn and know; that these individuals are a sub-race; they have neither the intellectual, mental or emotional abilities to equate or share in any of the functions of our civilisation.

Okay, but still no serious confirmation. After googling some biographies of Schweitzer, which had nothing to say on the subject, I hit upon [Wikipedia](#). They claimed that a racist quote attributed to Schweitzer was false as follows;

Quote:

There is a blatantly racist quote sometimes attributed to Schweitzer to the effect that Africans are an "inferior race" and must not be treated as the equal of Whites. This quote is a fabrication; it does not appear in Schweitzer's writings and does not reflect his respect for the African people he spent sixty years working for and with.

Well this is Wikipedia after all and one must be careful. So I continued to search and came upon this [site](#) The author, after providing the racist quote answers the question "Was Schweitzer a Racist" with a long convoluted apologist dissertation of which I'll just quote;

Quote:

Schweitzer might be considered a colonialist or perhaps even racist. Although a frequent response that I have had from my Gabonese friends has been a look of confusion or even bewilderment at the posing of the question, another common response has been sheer laughter. For these Africans, the moral core of Schweitzer's life and work is very simple: he gave up a privileged life in Europe to work for decades in hardship, offering every ounce of his energy and every fiber of his body to try to help alleviate the suffering of his African neighbors. Unlike many other "missionaries", he did not try to "win over" the souls of Africans for Christianity; he tried to heal their bodies and strengthen their spirits. Far from imposing European culture as a superior form of civilization, he instead built a "village hospital" modeled after local African villages, where patients and families could feel comfortably at home, supported by their own traditions.

I'm still not completely convinced that the quote is authentic, so I seek further confirmation.

But if it is true, don't you agree that it is time to relegate this 20th century revered philosopher to obscurity . He doesn't deserve the reverence that he has heretofore recieved.

 [Reply With Quote](#)

 10-16-2005, 11:29 AM

#2



[Johanna](#)



Charter  
Member

Join Date: Oct 1999  
Location: Altered States of America  
Posts: 13,376

Sounds like his entire reputation depends on whether the quote is real or fake.

Just wanted to note that in his book *Indian Thought and Its Development* Schweitzer criticized Aryan Hindu thought as "life-denying" but praised Dravidian thought as "life-affirming" (the highest value in his philosophy). In India, Aryans are stereotypically "white" in skin color while Dravidians are stereotypically "black."\* So at least as far as Hindu thought goes, Schweitzer is on record as considering black people's philosophy as superior to white.

\*In India there are people as white as Europeans and as black as Africans, though most are along the entire continuum of skin color in between. There are no distinct color lines in India in fact.

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 10-16-2005, 11:39 AM

#3

Join Date: Nov 1999

[Liberal](#) 

Guest

Location: Gone  
Posts: 39,401

I think it's telling that the Schweitzer site didn't deny the quote. They printed it in full, and then proceeded to dance all around it. Why didn't they just say, "He never wrote that."?

 [Reply With Quote](#) 10-16-2005, 11:49 AM

#4

[Revtim](#) 

Guest

Join Date: Mar 1999  
Location: Florida, USA  
Posts: 20,213

Quote:

Originally Posted by **The Flying Dutchman**  
*But if it is true, don't you agree that it is time to relegate this 20th century revered philosopher to obscurity . He doesn't deserve the reverence that he has heretofore recieved.*

Do you feel that same way about Abraham Lincoln?

<http://www.bartleby.com/251/>

"I have no purpose to introduce political and social equality between the white and the black races. There is a physical difference between the two which, in my judgment, will probably forbid their ever living together upon the footing of perfect equality; and inasmuch as it becomes a necessity that there must be a difference, I, as well as Judge Douglas, am in favor of the race to which I belong having the superior position."

"I will also add to the remarks I have made (for I am not going to enter at large upon this subject), that I have never had the least apprehension that I or my friends would marry negroes, if there was no law to keep them from it; but as Judge Douglas and his friends seem to be in great apprehension that they might, if there were no law to keep them from it, I give him the most solemn pledge that I will to the very last stand by the law of the State which forbids the marrying of white people with negroes."

Does Lincoln get a pass because of his earlier time? When's the cutoff point?

 [Reply With Quote](#) 10-16-2005, 01:06 PM

#5

[Marley23](#) 

I Am the One Who Bans

Join Date: Apr 2002  
Location: Brooklyn  
Posts: 78,234

Quote:

Originally Posted by **The Flying Dutchman**  
*But if it is true, don't you agree that it is time to relegate this 20th century revered philosopher to obscurity . He doesn't deserve the reverence that he has heretofore recieved.*

Based on a single quotation? No. But mostly, I'm skeptical of the quote. The same Wikipedia quotes Schweitzer as saying,

"Who can describe the injustice and cruelties that in the course of centuries they [the coloured peoples] have suffered at the hands of Europeans? . . . If a record could be compiled of all that has happened between the white and the coloured races, it would make a book containing numbers of pages which the reader would have to turn over unread because their contents

would be too horrible."

Unless something is out of context, I have some difficulty believing he made both statements. If Schweitzer had something of a "patronizing" attitude toward Africans, I wouldn't be surprised. We're talking about a man born in 1875. That's not the same as overt racism, however. Unless the racist sites provide a citation for their quotes, I'm inclined to distrust them.

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 10-16-2005, 01:44 PM

#6

[E-Sabbath](#) 

Guest

Join Date: Dec 2000  
Location: Up The River  
Posts: 13,944

Well. He could have said racist things. He could have believed racist things.

But the man sure as hell never did a damn racist thing that lasted. What he did was a monument to the greatness that humanity can accomplish. A statement made under circumstances we are not sure about, compared to decades of sainthood?

I'm willing to let his goodness and kindness stick around. You?

 [Reply With Quote](#)

 10-16-2005, 06:46 PM

#7



[Sailboat](#) 

Guest

Join Date: Aug 2005  
Posts: 11,948

Quote:

Originally Posted by **The Flying Dutchman**  
*I had just perused the Stormfront web page*

Is that the one that's subtitled Stormfront White Pride?

If so, I wouldn't consider their claims even worth investigating.

Sailboat

 [Reply With Quote](#)

 10-16-2005, 08:20 PM

#8

[Marley23](#) 

I Am the One Who Bans

Join Date: Apr 2002  
Location: Brooklyn  
Posts: 78,234

Quote:

Originally Posted by **E-Sabbath**  
*Well. He could have said racist things. He could have believed racist things.*

*But the man sure as hell never did a damn racist thing that lasted. What he did was a monument to the greatness that humanity can accomplish. A statement made under circumstances we are not sure about, compared to decades of sainthood?*

*I'm willing to let his goodness and kindness stick around. You?*

Based on a little Google searching, I can't find this quote posted anywhere except forums, often racist ones. If it's legit, I find that odd. On the other hand, the non-denial from the Schweitzer page leaves its own questions. Questions about I think we can argue about Schweitzer's patronizing attitude and racism, if any, the same way we've argued about Mother Teresa. Separating their words and actions is probably a good idea.

 [Reply With Quote](#)

 10-16-2005, 10:42 PM

#9

[Zoe](#)   
Guest

Join Date: Oct 2002  
Location: Liberal South  
Posts: 14,266

Such racism would be in opposition to to what seemed to be the core of his beliefs by the time of the publication of his book and the awarding of the Nobel Prize.

Excerpts from his Nobel Lecture:

Quote:

...Compassion, in which ethics takes root, does not assume its true proportions until it embraces not only man but every living being.

Quote:

May the men who hold the destiny of peoples in their hands, studiously avoid anything that might cause the present situation to deteriorate and become even more dangerous. May they take to heart the words of the Apostle Paul: "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men."

Since the book is based on his African notebooks and he was in African for such a long time, I guess it is [i]possible that he could have written the racist comments early in his service there before he grew in his understanding. If he included his own ugliness after his nobility emerged, then that just makes him honest and reflects his growth.

**Liberal**, you said that his website didn't deny that he had said it. Did they address the issue at all?


There is absolutely nothing that he could have written or said that would make him a "zero" though. The OP might want to learn to consider the possibility of "shades of gray" in his thinking.

I've known about Schweitzer for over half a century now. And this is the first unkind thing I've ever heard said about him. I'm all for knowing the truth, but it is going to take more than a rumor and quote from the "Stormfront" of all places 🤔, to change my impression.

 [Reply With Quote](#)

 10-16-2005, 10:51 PM

#10

[Marley23](#)   
I Am the One Who Bans

Join Date: Apr 2002  
Location: Brooklyn  
Posts: 78,234

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Zoe**  
**Liberal**, you said that his website didn't deny that he had said it. Did they address the issue at all?

[They do, in a somewhat confusing way.](#) They quote the passage mentioned in the OP, but I'm not sure if they're saying he did write it, or if they're giving it as part of a sample question. It's lengthy, but here's a sample:

Quote:

Beginning in the 1950's, however, an alternative and rather darker image of Schweitzer was painted by a small but significant number of detractors. As African nations and peoples threw off many of the chains of exploitative colonialism, these critics saw in Schweitzer a symbol of many of the sins of white Europeans working in Africa. Others condemned his village hospital as anachronistic and primitive, because it did not reflect the sparkling sanitary conditions of Europe and America's modern health care institutions.

Was Schweitzer a saint? Or a paternalistic racist? How should a critical thinker today even approach this question? [...]

Just as Jesus was in part a product of his own time and its thinking, so too was Albert Schweitzer. And just as understanding Jesus' life and teachings requires interpreting them within the framework of his contemporary world view, so too for Schweitzer. For example, Schweitzer is often criticized for having stated, early in his career in Africa, that "the African is my brother, but he is my younger brother." To many of today's ears, this has an unmistakable ring of paternalism and even racist condescension. But for a white European in 1913, leaving fame and adulation behind in Europe to dedicate his life to service to Africans in desperate need, the insistence that "the African is my brother" expresses a spirit of radical solidarity that was far outside the mainstream of contemporary European culture.

 [Reply With Quote](#)

 10-17-2005, 06:19 AM

#11

[Liberal](#) 

Guest

Join Date: Nov 1999

Location: Gone

Posts: 39,401

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Zoe**

*Liberal, you said that his website didn't deny that he had said it. Did they address the issue at all?*

Thirteen long and rambling paragraphs, nary a word of which disparages the authenticity of the quote, when all that is required is a simple, "Nonsense. Dr. Schweitzer said no such thing."

Don't get me wrong. I think it's clear that he said it, and at least by today's standards he was certainly racist. But so what? I think that sometimes people look at racism as a sin akin to how others look at homosexuality – something so grave and horrifying that it has its own special circle of hell. Nothing in the quote nullifies the work he did, and many other wonderful things he said.

 [Reply With Quote](#)

 10-17-2005, 07:51 AM

#12

[Jackmannii](#) 

Guest

Join Date: Oct 2000

Location: the extreme center

Posts: 31,920

There's also an early WWII-era quote from Gandhi in which he praises Hitler.

It doesn't invalidate Gandhi's good works.

 [Reply With Quote](#) 10-17-2005, 08:35 AM

#13

[E-Sabbath](#) 

Guest

Join Date: Dec 2000  
Location: Up The River  
Posts: 13,944

So, what we have here is an early quote from a great man, espousing an opinion he seems to have changed by the time of his Nobel Prize speech, but does not deny, recognizing it as a part of his early character to the point of publishing it in his collected diary.

People hold opinions. Sometimes they change them. Sometimes they're honest enough to not hide the old ones.

I am shocked.

 [Reply With Quote](#) 10-17-2005, 09:07 AM

#14

[The Flying Dutchman](#) 

Guest

Join Date: Nov 2000  
Location: 50N West Georgia Strait  
Posts: 8,617

Quote:

Originally Posted by **E-Sabbath**

*So, what we have here is an early quote from a great man, espousing an opinion he seems to have changed by the time of his Nobel Prize speech...*

Actually, according to the Schweitzer website;

Quote:

Q: On racist and anti-racist-sites I have found the following text:

**This is what he said shortly before his death:**

I have given my life to alleviate the sufferings of Africa. There is something that all white men who have lived here, must learn and know; that these individuals are a sub-race; they have neither the intellectual , mental or emotional abilities to equate or share in any of the functions of our civilisation...

 [Reply With Quote](#) 10-17-2005, 10:59 AM

#15

[E-Sabbath](#) 

Guest

Join Date: Dec 2000  
Location: Up The River  
Posts: 13,944

Don't selectively quote, now.

Quote:

Was Schweitzer a racist?

Q: On racist and anti-racist-sites I have found the following text:

**This is what he said shortly before his death:**

I have given my life to alleviate the sufferings of Africa. There is something that all white men who have lived here, must learn and know; that these individuals are a sub-race; they have

neither the intellectual , mental or emotional abilities to equate or share in any of the functions of our civilisation.

"I have given my life to try to bring unto them the advantages which our civilisation must offer, but I have become well aware that we must retain this status; white, the superior, and they the inferior; for whenever a white man seeks to live among them as their equal, they will either destroy him or devour him, and they will destroy all his work; and so for any existing relationship or for any benefit to this people let white men from anywhere in the world who would come to help Africa remember that you must continually retain this status; you the master, and they the inferior, like children that you would help or teach. Never fraternise with them as equals, never accept them as your social equals ; or they will devour you; they will destroy you."- Dr. Albert Schweitzer, winner of the 1952 Nobel Prize for peace, in his 1961 book, From My African Notebook.

Dr. Albert Schweitzer, winner of the 1952 Nobel Prize for peace, in his 1961 book, From My African Notebook.

So, it was something he wrote in his book, which was from his notebook.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **From the same webpage, at schweitzer.org**  
*For example, Schweitzer is often criticized for having stated, early in his career in Africa, that "the African is my brother, but he is my younger brother."*

Quote:

Nonetheless, later in his life Schweitzer was quoted as saying that "The time for speaking of older and younger brothers has passed."

Quote:

Note on translation: Some of the most troubling and even offensive passages in Schweitzer's writings as they have appeared in English reflect problems or even frank errors in translation, rather than Schweitzer's own thoughts. Perhaps the most extreme in this regard are references by Dr. Schweitzer to Africans as "savages". In fact, although Schweitzer used several different German words to refer to his African neighbors, none of those would be translated as "savage" today, but rather as "black" or "native" or "primitive". The translation by Mrs. C.E.B. Russell of this book into English was published in 1939, and her use of the word "savage" is as mistaken and regrettable as it is offensive.

Let's see if I can find it in his notebook.

Amazon does not allow searching inside that book. I can not find the phrase in his searchable books.

Web: Except for Schweitzer.org, the rest of the sites are craptacular in nature.

Crank through the newsgroups.

People noting that it is from the notebooks... Bunch of cranks treating it like holy writ...

I'm not finding it in larger context anywhere.

Let's find more out about the man, shall we?

<http://www.schweitzerfellowship.org/...es/about/phil/>

Aha. His thoughts on Africa and Missionaries, at

<http://www.schweitzerfellowship.org/...hil.aspx?id=21>

Quote:

The following is excerpted from a sermon Dr. Schweitzer preached on Sunday January 6, 1905, at



the morning service of St. Nicolai's Church in Strasbourg, just before his 30 th birthday. While he had decided that he would devote the rest of his life to medical training and then service in Africa, he had not yet told anyone.

...Our culture divides people into two classes: civilized men, a title bestowed on the persons who do the classifying; and others, who have only the human form, who may perish or go to the dogs for all the "civilized men" care.

Oh, this "noble" culture of ours! It speaks so piously of human dignity and human rights and then disregards this dignity and these rights of countless millions and treads them underfoot, only because they live overseas or because their skins are of different color or because they cannot help themselves. This culture does not know how hollow and miserable and full of glib talk it is, how common it looks to those who follow it across the seas and see what it has done there, and this culture has no right to speak of personal dignity and human rights.

So... I don't know. I need to know the broader context, and I need to know the historical condition. Anyone got a copy of the book?

 [Reply With Quote](#)

 10-17-2005, 12:02 PM

#16

[Revtim](#) 

Guest

Join Date: Mar 1999  
Location: Florida, USA  
Posts: 20,213

**The Flying Dutchman**, any comments about my Lincoln post (#4 in the thread)?

 [Reply With Quote](#)

 10-17-2005, 12:22 PM

#17

[The Flying Dutchman](#)

  
Guest

Join Date: Nov 2000  
Location: 50N West Georgia Strait  
Posts: 8,617

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Revtim**  
**The Flying Dutchman**, any comments about my Lincoln post (#4 in the thread)?

If you insist. Not being American or black, Lincoln is not that important to me. He died after all 100 years earlier than Schweitzer, in the middle of the 19th century when racism in America was pretty well the rule.

Schweitzer on the other hand is a citizen of the world who died when I was 15 years old. He is held in the highest regard yet allegedly made this extremely racist remark at the same time as the onset of apartheid in South Africa, which was immediately criticized worldwide yet would be appropriate considering the import of the alleged Schweitzer quote.

I have made a query with Snopes.

 [Reply With Quote](#)

 10-17-2005, 12:23 PM

#18

[Liberal](#) 

Guest

Join Date: Nov 1999  
Location: Gone  
Posts: 39,401

With all the college students here, it should be easy for someone to drop by a library and look

in the book.

 [Reply With Quote](#)

 10-17-2005, 01:25 PM

#19

[Marley23](#) 

I Am the One Who Bans

Join Date: Apr 2002

Location: Brooklyn

Posts: 78,234

Quote:

Originally Posted by **The Flying Dutchman**

*Schweitzer on the other hand is a citizen of the world who died when I was 15 years old.*

Although, for all of that, he was born in 1875 and raised in a time when such an attitude was not so shocking. **Lib** is right that this ought to be easy to resolve. Meanwhile, as I keep looking at the Schweitzer page, I think they're confirming he said it.

 [Reply With Quote](#)

 10-17-2005, 06:49 PM

#20

[tomndebb](#) 

Mod Rocker

Moderator

Join Date: Mar 1999

Location: N E Ohio

Posts: 40,881

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Liberal**

*With all the college students here, it should be easy for someone to drop by a library and look in the book.*

Well, the colleges are not very close to my house, but I had an errand that brought me within a few miles of the one branch of our county library that had a copy and I checked it out.

I have just finished reading [African Notebook](#), Albert Schweitzer, translated by Mrs. C. E. B. Russell.

A Midland Book

Indiana University Press

Bloomington 1958.

Copyright 1939 By Henry Holt And Company, Inc.

Manufactured in the United States of America

Library of Congress Catalog Number: 58-12209

Fifth Printing 1961

Having now completely read the book (it is pretty short) I can state unequivocally that the passages quoted in the OP do not appear in the book. There is no mention of "sub-races." No passage speaks of "destroying" or "devouring" white men. In fact, while there are many passages that sound a bit paternalistic, the final chapter is an essay that indicates that the white man must meet the black man as an equal and that most of the idiosyncracies that Europeans perceive in Africans are little more than cultural differences imposed by the widely differing living conditions of the two groups.

Once again, those who need to instill hatred and fear have resorted to manufacturing it.

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 10-17-2005, 07:10 PM

#21

[Kimstu](#) 

Guest

Join Date: Dec 1999

Posts: 22,590

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Liberal**  
*I think it's clear that he said it*

I would definitely suspend judgement as long as no actual cite is given. People with agendas make up all kinds of shit about what famous people actually said.

I'm also puzzled as to why the alleged quote is attributed to Schweitzer "shortly before his death", and uses (twice) the phrase "I have given my life to [help Africans]", but is said to have appeared in *From My African Notebook*, which apparently was translated into English in 1939 from a German original, *Afrikanische Geschichten*, that as far as I can tell was published in 1936 or 1938.

Considering that Schweizer died in 1965 at the age of 90, could 1938 really be described as "shortly before his death"? If the alleged quote comes, on the other hand, from 1961 which really **was** shortly before his death, what book was it supposedly published in? I smell a large smelly rat.

[In preview: Yup, a large smelly racist rat. Thanks **tom**, and I trust we all apologize to Mr. Schweitzer for the large smelly racist rats out to damage his reputation.]

 [Reply With Quote](#) 10-17-2005, 07:25 PM

#22

[Zoe](#) 

Guest

Join Date: Oct 2002

Location: Liberal South

Posts: 14,266

Thanks, **Tom**. Your efforts are much appreciated.

 [Reply With Quote](#) 10-17-2005, 09:24 PM

#23

[Marley23](#) 

I Am the One Who Bans

Join Date: Apr 2002

Location: Brooklyn

Posts: 78,234

Good work, **tom**. I'm going to try e-mailing the people behind that Schweitzer page. It's absurd that they couldn't give a straightforward denial.

 [Reply With Quote](#) 10-18-2005, 12:43 AM

#24

[E-Sabbath](#) 

Guest

Join Date: Dec 2000

Location: Up The River

Posts: 13,944

Thank you, **Tom**.

 [Reply With Quote](#) 10-18-2005, 01:39 AM

#25

[Liberal](#) 

Guest

Join Date: Nov 1999

Location: Gone

Posts: 39,401

Quote:

Originally Posted by **tomndebb**

*Having now completely read the book (it is pretty short) I can state unequivocally that the passages quoted in the OP do not appear in the book. There is no mention of "sub-races." No passage speaks of "destroying" or "devouring" white men. In fact, while there are many passages that sound a bit paternalistic, the final chapter is an essay that indicates that the white man must meet the black man as an equal and that most of the idiosyncracies that Europeans perceive in Africans are little more than cultural differences imposed by the widely differing living conditions of the two groups.*

Excellent, thanks. One thing you might consider doing is informing Barbara. It would be nice to have this item on Snopes.

 [Reply With Quote](#)
 10-18-2005, 09:00 AM

#26

## [The Flying Dutchman](#)



Guest

Join Date: Nov 2000  
Location: 50N West Georgia Strait  
Posts: 8,617

Good work **tom** ! Talk about fighting ignorance !

As mentioned, I have submitted a new "submission" to Snopes. I sure hope this trash gets more widely debunked.

 [Reply With Quote](#)
 10-18-2005, 09:13 AM

#27

## [Liberal](#)



Guest

Join Date: Nov 1999  
Location: Gone  
Posts: 39,401

Maybe we should also inform the Schweitzer people. They really need to spell out plainly that he didn't write that. It should be the first sentence of the first paragraph of their response.

 [Reply With Quote](#)
 10-18-2005, 09:19 AM

#28

## [Revtim](#)



Guest

Join Date: Mar 1999  
Location: Florida, USA  
Posts: 20,213

Although it seems extremely likely this is resolved, I'm not sure we can completely eliminate the possibility that the offending text was simply edited out of the version **tomndebb** found. I guess it was printed in 1961; would a publisher in that time have edited out stuff like the text in question?

That would explain why the Schweitzer people don't flatly state that he didn't say it.

 [Reply With Quote](#)
 10-18-2005, 10:12 AM

#29

## [Kimstu](#)



Guest

Join Date: Dec 1999  
Posts: 22,590

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Revtim**

*I'm not sure we can completely eliminate the possibility that the offending text was simply edited out of the version **tomndebb** found. I guess it was printed in 1961; would a publisher in that time have edited out stuff like the text in question?*

1961 is the date of the fifth printing of the English translation by Russell, which was copyrighted in 1939. Under the terms of the copyright, I don't think that the publisher would be allowed to excise portions of the published text without stating clearly that it was an abridged version.

If people are really still bothered by this, I can try at some point in the next couple weeks to get hold of a copy of Schweitzer's *Afrikanische Geschichten* and see what he wrote in the original German, but please don't make me do that unless you feel it's really important.

As for why the Schweitzer site didn't deny the authenticity of that "quote", it looked to me as though their answer wasn't really addressing the alleged quote at all. They just had some standard boilerplate response to the question "Was Schweitzer a racist?" and that's what they put in the FAQ.

 [Reply With Quote](#)

 10-18-2005, 10:19 AM

#30

[Revtim](#) 

Guest

Join Date: Mar 1999  
Location: Florida, USA  
Posts: 20,213

Actually, now that I read the FAQ item for myself at <http://www.schweitzer.org/english/di...faq.htm#racist> I'm leaning on the side that he said it, but it was edited from at least that 1961 version. The FAQ item is written by Lachlan Forrow MD, who wrote the foreword for at least [this](#) edition of 'African Diary', so it's a pretty safe bet he's familiar enough with the work to know if the quote was fraudulent or not. If the quote was false, I cannot imagine why he would not have flatly stated so instead of excusing it by saying things like "Albert Schweitzer was not a saint; Albert Schweitzer was a human being, a man who was shaped by his historical era but nonetheless transcended it."

Note that I have no dog in race (pun not intended); my only familiarity with Schweitzer was his general reputation as a good guy and the use of his name in analogy, as in "He's no Albert Schweitzer". Before this thread, I didn't know what he did specifically to earn his humanitarian reputation.

 [Reply With Quote](#)

 10-18-2005, 10:38 AM

#31

[Kimstu](#) 

Guest

Join Date: Dec 1999  
Posts: 22,590

Oh, ginger snaps. Okay folks, can we reach a consensus here on what **will** settle the question of whether Schweitzer actually wrote this remark? If I read the German version and don't find it, will we start wondering whether maybe it was just excised from that edition too?

Are we at least agreed that the alleged source of the alleged quote is the following?

Quote:

Schweitzer, Albert, *From My African Notehook*. (*Afrikanische Geschichten*. Leipzig, Flix Meiner. 1938.) Translated by Mrs. C.E.B. Russell. London, Allen & Unwin, 1938.

If I find a copy of *Afrikanische Geschichten* as published in the original German, read it, and don't find the alleged quote, will we all agree that the alleged ascription to Schweitzer is

bullshit?

(Actually, it should be good enough to check a first edition of the English translation by Russell, since that's where the remark in question is alleged to have been found.)

 [Reply With Quote](#)

10-18-2005, 10:39 AM

#32

[tomndebb](#) 

Mod Rocker  
Moderator

Join Date: Mar 1999  
Location: N E Ohio  
Posts: 40,881

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Revtim**  
*Although it seems extremely likely this is resolved, I'm not sure we can completely eliminate the possibility that the offending text was simply edited out of the version **tomndebb** found. I guess it was printed in 1961; would a publisher in that time have edited out stuff like the text in question?*

*That would explain why the Schweitzer people don't flatly state that he didn't say it.*

The actual quotation on the blog page (as quoted in the OP and confirmed by a visit to the blog) is

Quote:

- Dr. Albert Schweitzer, winner of the 1952 Nobel Prize for peace, in his 1961 book, From My African Notebook.

Note the dates on my reference.

Actually, as I noted, there are any number of selections from the book that would be viewed, particularly in the 21st century, as paternalistic. However, I doubt that a book printed in 1939 would be republished twice in the same year (copyright issues) once complete and once abridged, especially with no notation of abridgement.

 [Reply With Quote](#)

10-18-2005, 10:43 AM

#33

[Revtim](#) 

Guest

Join Date: Mar 1999  
Location: Florida, USA  
Posts: 20,213

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Kimstu**  
*As for why the Schweitzer site didn't deny the authenticity of that "quote", it looked to me as though their answer wasn't really addressing the alleged quote at all. They just had some standard boilerplate response to the question "Was Schweitzer a racist?" and that's what they put in the FAQ.*

Perhaps, but doesn't that seem somewhat unlikely? What a howling error to use the quote as part of the question, where the answer is solely to defend Schweitzer, but not mention the quote is fabricated.

In any case, I found Dr. Lachlan's email and asked for clarification. I'll let you know what the answer is, if I get one.

 [Reply With Quote](#)

10-18-2005, 10:45 AM

#34

[Revtim](#) 

Guest

Join Date: Mar 1999  
Location: Florida, USA  
Posts: 20,213

Crap, he's out of the office (in Japan) without email access until Thursday, Oct. 27. It'll be a while, if I ever get an answer. And hopefully it won't be more dancing.

 [Reply With Quote](#)

10-18-2005, 10:46 AM

#35

[Kimstu](#) 

Guest

Join Date: Dec 1999  
Posts: 22,590

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Revtim**  
*I'm leaning on the side that he said it, but it was edited from at least that 1961 version.*

Then how are we to interpret the statements, frequently accompanying that racist remark, that it was "from his 1961 book" and "what he said shortly before his death" (which occurred in 1965)?

None of that would apply to a quote appearing in 1938 but excised from the 1961 printing of the same text.

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10-18-2005, 11:05 AM

#36

[Revtim](#) 

Guest

Join Date: Mar 1999  
Location: Florida, USA  
Posts: 20,213

**tomndebb**, **Kimstu**, good point about the "from his 1961 book" text, I consider that evidence that the quote was fabricated. Of course it could simply a mistake about where exactly they got it from.

The primary reason I'm still leaning on the side of the quote being genuine is because  
1) I think it's likely that Dr. Lachlan is familiar with the work, so he'd know if it was there  
2) His text in FAQ explains it away as him being "a man who was shaped by his historical era", when it would have been far easier and truthful to simply point out it was fabricated.

IMHO, that's stronger evidence towards the quote being genuine and not it that particular edition or copy.

Of course, maybe Dr. Lachlan just made a mistake and/or wrote some crappy text. Maybe he'll get back to me and we'll know for sure.

 [Reply With Quote](#)

10-18-2005, 11:45 AM

#37

[Liberal](#) 

Guest

Join Date: Nov 1999  
Location: Gone  
Posts: 39,401

This has become a really interesting discussion now. Once you've determined that the hoofprints in the sand aren't horses, the possibility of zebras opens up, as it were. Suppose, for example, that...

- 1) ...the Schweitzer site is itself run by white supremacists.
- 2) ...the date attributed is wrong, but the quote is indeed in the '39 version.
- 3) ...the quote is from another book.
- 4) ...the Schweitzer people themselves have not bothered reading the book.
- 5) ... Tom overlooked the text, or the text appeared in a preface or introduction in an earlier edition

As we search for answers, in the meantime, I'll tell you what really bothers me about the quote being inauthentic. Mainly, it is so complicated. It isn't just a one-liner about those god awful negroes — it is a thought-through developed paragraph with a topic sentence and dependent text. And it reads very much like other excerpts from the book that are found elsewhere in terms of style of writing (although that, in and of itself, isn't that hard to do.) The quote may be made up, but whoever made it up was not an idiot.

It will be interesting to see what Barbara does with it because she usually researches pretty exhaustively. She'll likely hunt down the 1939 edition. Hopefully, Revtim's contact will turn up something as well.

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 10-18-2005, 11:55 AM

#38

[Marley23](#) 

I Am the One Who Bans

Join Date: Apr 2002  
Location: Brooklyn  
Posts: 78,234

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Kimstu**

*As for why the Schweitzer site didn't deny the authenticity of that "quote", it looked to me as though their answer wasn't really addressing the alleged quote at all. They just had some standard boilerplate response to the question "Was Schweitzer a racist?" and that's what they put in the FAQ.*

Which, because of the way it was presented, is confusing.

I did e-mail the Webmaster last night, and I said more or less what **Lib** suggests - that it appears Schweitzer never said these words, and that they ought to begin their response to the issue with a simple and direct statement to that effect. The longer answer to the question of "was he a racist?" is interesting, but without a straightforward response it looks evasive. I am hoping, of course, that if any of us have got something wrong and Schweitzer *did* say those things, they'll correct me. Of course, if he did say it they should put that in their first sentence, too.

 [Reply With Quote](#)

 10-18-2005, 12:04 PM

#39

[Revtim](#) 

Guest

Join Date: Mar 1999  
Location: Florida, USA  
Posts: 20,213

Quote:

Originally Posted by **The Flying Dutchman**

*As mentioned, I have submitted a new "submission" to Snopes.*



Was this an email, or on the discussion board?

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 10-18-2005, 08:23 PM

#40

## [The Flying Dutchman](#)



Guest

Join Date: Nov 2000  
Location: 50N West Georgia Strait  
Posts: 8,617

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Revtim**  
*Was this an email, or on the discussion board?*

An e-mail for which I received an immediate return e-mail acknowledging my submission. I don't know who Barbara is but it certainly wouldn't hurt to take that track as well.

 [Reply With Quote](#)

 10-18-2005, 08:26 PM

#41

## [Marley23](#)

I Am the One Who Bans

Join Date: Apr 2002  
Location: Brooklyn  
Posts: 78,234

Quote:

Originally Posted by **The Flying Dutchman**  
*An e-mail for which I received an immediate return e-mail acknowledging my submission. I don't know who Barbara is but it certainly wouldn't hurt to take that track as well.*

Barbara and David Mikkelson run the site. Years ago, I assumed Snopes was run by a sizeable organization and I sent them an e-mail asking if they had any available internships. She wrote me back and said yes, but only if I wanted to sleep on their floor. 😊

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 10-19-2005, 08:37 AM

#42

## [Revtim](#)

Guest

Join Date: Mar 1999  
Location: Florida, USA  
Posts: 20,213

Good news, it looks like Dr Lachlan does have access to email, and I just got his response.

His reply was simply "The quote is utterly false."

I thanked him for his time, and suggested that that FAQ item be changed to state this clearly and plainly, in the first sentence.

I consider this resolved. This man's FAQ text, which seemed to imply the quote was excusable because of the time, was what had me leaning towards it being genuine. It seems, as I postulated before, that Dr. Lachlan "wrote some crappy text".

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 10-19-2005, 10:33 AM

#43

## [E-Sabbath](#)

Join Date: Dec 2000  
Location: Up The River

Guest

Posts: 13,944

Ignorance is fought! The day is saved! Thanks to... the Moderator... girls...

You know, actual ignorance being fought might be worthy of a SDSAB article for Tom.

 [Reply With Quote](#)
 10-19-2005, 10:36 AM

#44

[E-Sabbath](#) 

Guest

 Join Date: Dec 2000  
 Location: Up The River  
 Posts: 13,944

Or RevTim... look, brain has escaped. Come back brain, I have coffee.

Ahem. The point being, if we get the FAQ changed appropriately (And check all the quotes listed, just to be sure), it's a textbook perfect example of how the Dope is supposed to work. Thanks, Dutchman, for bringing this up.

 [Reply With Quote](#)
 10-19-2005, 12:58 PM

#45

[Marley23](#) 

I Am the One Who Bans

 Join Date: Apr 2002  
 Location: Brooklyn  
 Posts: 78,234

Quote:

Originally Posted by **E-Sabbath**

*The point being, if we get the FAQ changed appropriately (And check all the quotes listed, just to be sure), it's a textbook perfect example of how the Dope is supposed to work.*

I was thinking the same thing the last time I was in this thread. Good work, everybody.

 [Reply With Quote](#)
 10-19-2005, 09:40 PM

#46

[capybara](#) 

Charter Member

 Join Date: Aug 1999  
 Location: Citizen of the World  
 Posts: 4,999

Well, darn, before I got to the end of the thread I requested a 1953 German edition from the library; I'll skim through it anyway tomorrow. I'm interested to see what terms he's using anyway in German, or what segments may have been 'creatively' interpreted.

 [Reply With Quote](#)
 10-20-2005, 05:25 AM

#47

[Liberal](#) 

Guest

 Join Date: Nov 1999  
 Location: Gone  
 Posts: 39,401

No harm in that. It's a good idea. Lachlan seems to be a poor communicator anyway. Even his e-mail reply isn't well worded. It could mean that the quote, while accurately rendered, makes false assertions about Africans. I doubt that that's what he meant, but still.

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 10-20-2005, 07:56 AM

#48

Join Date: Mar 1999

[Revtim](#) 

Guest

Location: Florida, USA  
Posts: 20,213

Dagnabbit Lib, I was sure this was resolved but you planted a seed of doubt in my mind. I sent another reply to Lachlan asking for clarification. He responded "It is utterly inconceivable that Albert Schweitzer ever said or wrote that." A highly pessimistic interpretation of this statement might find ways to the postulate it was still written but Lachlan simply still found it "inconceivable" but true, but I want to let this one stand.

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 10-20-2005, 08:56 AM

#49

[Diogenes the Cynic](#) 

BANNED

Join Date: Oct 2002  
Location: St. Paul, MN  
Posts: 58,797

It seems to me like this has been completely resolved. No one has been able to cite a source for that quote and parsing Lachlan's denial just seems silly. Unless someone can actually cite a source for the quote then decency dictates that we assume he didn't say it. Let's not forget where the burden of proof lies here.

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 10-20-2005, 12:32 PM

#50

[Liberal](#) 

Guest

Join Date: Nov 1999  
Location: Gone  
Posts: 39,401

It shifted to us when the Whitists cited their source. We're just attempting to pin it down. Tom read the book they cited and did not find the quote. That shifted it back to the Whitists. But then came the suggestion that it could have been found in an older version. Lots of times, books have their introductions or prefaces rewritten. So we inquired of Dr. Lachlan. But his response was somewhat coy, and frankly so is his new one. We aren't interested in what Dr. Lachlan can conceive; we're interested in whether Schweitzer every wrote that paragraph.

Capaybara has offered the perfect solution. He has obtained and is reading the original text in its original language. His findings will convince me completely. Meanwhile, I'm only somewhere between 90% and 95% convinced. Good enough for government work, perhaps, but this is one of those rare, honest to goodness Straight Dope projects that's true to the mission statement. We have the opportunity to be 100% sure. Let's not sit on our laurels until the race is finished.

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 10-20-2005, 01:37 PM

#51

[Diogenes the Cynic](#) 

BANNED

Join Date: Oct 2002  
Location: St. Paul, MN  
Posts: 58,797

No, the burden did not shift because no one has proven the quote ever existed in the book in question. There is still *no proof* that Schweizer said or wrote anything like that. Lachlan's responses have not been remotely coy. They've been unequivocal denials. No one has been able to cite a genuine source for the quote and none of the attempted cites reference an original version of Shweizer's book, they cite "1961" and "shortly before his death."

Until somebody can prove he said it (which I'm confident they won't) then it's indecent and defamatory to keep demanding greater and greater levels of *disproof*.

 [Reply With Quote](#)

 10-20-2005, 02:04 PM

#52

[tomndebb](#) 

Mod Rocker  
Moderator

Join Date: Mar 1999  
Location: N E Ohio  
Posts: 40,881

DtC, I don't see your concern. Is there a *problem* with trying to nail this down further? Are you being put out in any way because further research is being invested?

Clearly we have persuaded you, (and based on my reading of the last chapter of thje book, I would say that the spurious quote is completely at odds with Schweitzer's views), but we're just digging up information, not trying to fight off swarms of posts by S F patrons. If the continued pursuit bothers you, don't open the thread.

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 10-20-2005, 02:25 PM

#53

[Marley23](#) 

I Am the One Who Bans

Join Date: Apr 2002  
Location: Brooklyn  
Posts: 78,234

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Liberal**  
*So we inquired of Dr. Lachlan. But his response was somewhat coy, and frankly so is his new one. We aren't interested in what Dr. Lachlan can conceive; we're interested in whether Schweitzer every wrote that paragraph.*

If you ever go with a new handle on this board, can I suggest **Literal**? 😊 I've got nothing against looking into this further, and I'm glad someone is reading the book in the original German. That's where the certainty is.

Still, you're squinting too hard at this statement. "It is utterly inconceivable that Albert Schweitzer ever said or wrote that" is not coy. If we are dealing with someone intimately familiar with Schweitzer's writing - and if he's not, that would be the only place I can find room for doubt here - we're talking about a credible and pretty strongly worded opinion from experience. If you were talking to *me* and I said it was "inconceivable," coming from the point of view of someone who knows next to nothing about Schweitzer, then there would be more wiggle room.

I strongly doubt he was saying "Schweitzer didn't say this because I can't imagine it." He was saying "The statement is so far out of line with Schweitzer's views that it's impossible to imagine him actually saying it."

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 10-20-2005, 03:18 PM

#54

**Liberal** 

Guest

Join Date: Nov 1999

Location: Gone

Posts: 39,401

Like I said, that's what I think he said too. But he could use some serious remedial lessons for the sake of his expository skills.

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